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ABSTRACT

Research has found the majority of college students are working in full- or part-time capacities while classes are in session. Research has identified several benefits of college student employment. This study analyzed additional career decision-making benefits associated with college student employment, especially when such employment offers students the opportunity to obtain job experiences in areas related to their career interests. First year college student's (n=305) career interests were measured by Holland's Self-Directed Search--Form CP. Two levels of occupation-interest congruence were specified: incongruent, and congruent. Career decision making variables were assessed by the Career Locus of Control Scale and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale. The data from this investigation provide evidence that students who are employed in occupations that are congruent with their career interests possess more of an internal locus of control than other students. However, results question the notion that career decision-making self-efficacy is related to congruence between occupation and career interests. Results emphasize the need for businesses and communities to work together to provide a wide variety of work experiences for college students. Findings also underscore the importance of cooperative learning arrangements and internship programs that provide students with the opportunity to "try out" various career options during their college years. (JBJ)

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The Impact of College Student Employment on the Career Decision-Making Process

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The Impact of College Student Employment on the Career Decision-Making Process

According to recent estimates, the majority of college students are working in a full- or part-time capacity while classes are in session (Stern & Nakata, 1991). Only recently, however, have researchers begun analyzing the impact that employment during college has upon the career development of students. Research conducted over the past several years has clearly identified several benefits of college student employment. Hammes and Haller (1983), for example, in an investigation of the academic and non-academic consequences of holding a part-time job while attending college, found evidence that working students (on the average) had significantly higher grade point averages (GPAs) than non-working students. Similarly, Augenblick, Van de Water, and Associates (1987) discovered that students employed in occupations related to their career interests had higher grades than students employed in occupations unrelated to their interest areas.

Kane, Healy, and Henson (1992) and Luzzo (1995) have recently extended this line of research. Kane et al. discovered that college students employed in part-time jobs that are congruent with their career interests are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than students whose work is not congruent with their interests. More recently, Luzzo found additional benefits for students whose college employment is congruent with career aspirations, including higher levels of

career maturity and increased knowledge of career decision-making principles.

The notion of congruence between an individual's occupation and her or his career interests stems from Holland's (1985a) theory of vocational choice. Holland postulated that vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement depend directly upon the congruence (or match) between one's personality and the environment in which she or he works. A review of person-environment congruence research (Spokane, 1985) included substantial evidence that the congruence between a person's occupation and her or his inventoried vocational interests is positively correlated with various measures of adaptive career functioning, including academic performance, academic persistence (i.e., retention), and job satisfaction.

In order to increase our understanding of the impact that employment during college has on the career development of college students, the following investigation was conducted. The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of additional career decision-making benefits associated with college student employment, especially when such employment offers students the opportunity to obtain job experiences in areas related to their career interests.

Method

Participants

The participants included 305 first-year college students (179 women and 126 men) attending a medium sized public

university in the South. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 38 years, with a mean age of 18.68 (*SD* = 2.08). Participants included African Americans (*n* = 21), Native Americans (*n* = 7), Asian Americans (*n* = 3), Mexican Americans (*n* = 2), Caucasians (*n* = 259), and students who indicated that they were international students (*n* = 13). The majority of the participants (*n* = 154) indicated that they were employed at the time of the investigation. Participants who indicated current employment worked an average of 20.05 hours per week (*SD* = 8.65).

Measures

Demographic information. Each participant reported their age, gender, ethnicity, career aspiration, academic major, current occupation, and average number of hours worked each week on the first page of their questionnaire.

Career interests. Participants' career interests were measured by Holland's (1994) Self-Directed Search--Form CP. The SDS is a self-administered, self-scored, and self-interpreted career interest inventory that includes five scales: Occupational Daydreams, Activities, Competencies, Occupations, and Self-Estimates. Except for the Occupational Daydreams, the scales are used to calculate the total score for each of the six vocational personality types theorized by Holland (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional). Adequate support of the reliability and validity of the SDS to warrant its use as a measure of career interests is provided in the *SDS Professional Manual* (Holland, 1985b).

Current occupation-career interest congruence. Participants' occupation-interest congruence (i.e., the match between their employment and their inventoried interests) was measured by coding each student's current occupation and career interests according to the Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes (Gottfredson, Holland, & Ogawa, 1982). Occupations were assigned a three-letter Holland code based on the degree to which each of the six occupational types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional) are represented in that particular occupation. The three-letter Holland code for career interests was determined based on the three occupational areas that were most dominant in each participant's SDS profile.

Actual congruence values were calculated by applying Iachan's (1984) scoring procedure, a system of congruence calculation that has been used in several studies in the past. Using the three-letter codes for the occupation and the student's inventoried interests, a mathematical calculation is made with 29 possible levels of congruence. Higher scores indicate greater levels of congruence (i.e., a closer match between one's occupation and her or his vocational interests). For the purposes of statistical comparisons, two levels of occupation-interest congruence were specified in this study: incongruent (i.e., students who were working in occupations whose Iachan code was between 0 and 13), and congruent (i.e., students who were working in occupations whose Iachan code was greater than 13).

Career decision-making variables. Career decision making was

assessed in this investigation by having each participant complete the Career Locus of Control Scale (Trice, Haire, & Elliott, 1989) and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (Betz, Taylor, & Klein, 1994).

The Career Locus of Control Scale (CLCS) is an 18 item scale developed by Trice et al. (1989) that assesses an individual's locus of control for career-related activities. Respondents indicate whether each statement is "true" of "false" for them. Higher scores indicate a relatively external career locus of control. Research has consistently revealed a moderate relationship between career locus of control and adaptive career functioning (Blustein, 1987). Adequate reliability and validity of the CLCS has been demonstrated in previous investigations with college students (Trice et al., 1989).

The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDMSES-SF) (Betz et al., 1994) is a 25 item scale that measures an individual's confidence (i.e., self-efficacy) for making career decisions. Those completing the CDMSES-SF responded to each statement by indicating their agreement with the statement on a scale of 0 (completely disagree) to 9 (completely agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. Findings of several investigations have provided evidence that career decision-making self-efficacy is associated with career maturity and adaptive career functioning (Blustein, 1989; Taylor & Popma, 1990). Support of the reliability and validity of the CDMSES-SF has been reported (Betz et al., 1994).

Procedure

Research assistants asked students during a session of their University Orientation course (required of all first-year students at the university) to volunteer their participation in the study. Participants received a survey packet that included the demographic questionnaire, the two assessments of career decision making (arranged in a counterbalanced order), and several additional measures not utilized in this investigation. All participants completed the SDS earlier in the semester as a standard component of the university orientation course.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to determine differences in career decision-making self-efficacy and career locus of control between (a) students who were not employed, (b) students who were employed in jobs that were incongruent with their career interests, and (c) students who were employed in jobs that were congruent with their interests.

Results

Results of the ANOVA for career locus of control indicated a significant effect of occupation-interest congruence on students' sense of control over the career decision-making process, F (2, 284) = 3.11, $p < .05$. As shown in Table 1, students who were unemployed displayed more of an external career locus of control than students who were employed. The most internal career locus of control was exhibited by students whose occupations were congruent with their career interests.

Results of the ANOVA for career decision-making self-efficacy indicated the lack of a significant effect of occupation-interest congruence on students' self-efficacy for making effective career decisions, F (2, 284) = 0.78, p > .05. Participants whose occupations were congruent with their career interests did not possess significantly higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than their peers who were unemployed or employed in an incongruent occupation.

Discussion

The data from this investigation provide evidence that students who are employed in occupations that are congruent with their career interests possess more of an internal career locus of control than other students. Students working in jobs congruent with their interests were more likely to possess the belief that they have a significant amount of control over the career decision-making process than other students who were either unemployed or working in jobs that are incongruent with their career interests. The importance of this finding is underscored when one considers that students with an external career locus of control could very easily begin to develop a type of "learned helplessness" towards career development. Such an attitude often leads to students' failure to engage in important career decision-making tasks (e.g., career exploration activities) during their college years. Students who obtain congruent employment exhibit a more adaptive attributional style for career decision making (i.e., possess an internal career

locus of control) than their peers who are not employed in occupations that are congruent with their interests.

At the same time, results of this investigation question the notion that career decision-making self-efficacy is related to the congruence between one's occupation and her or his career interests. Students whose occupations were congruent with their interests did not exhibit higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than students whose occupations were incongruent with their interests and students who were not employed. Apparently, working in a job that is congruent with one's career interests is not related to an individual's career decision-making self-efficacy. Such a finding emphasizes the need for student affairs professionals to provide other types of activities for assisting students in the development of their self-efficacy for career decision-making tasks.

There are both theoretical and practical implications of the results of this investigation. In terms of theory development, results provide additional evidence of the importance of congruence in person-environment interactions. Specifically, findings support Holland's (1985a) contentions regarding the importance of vocational congruence as it relates to a student's perception of control over the career decision-making process. In terms of practical implications, the results of this study and previous investigations with college students (Augenblick et al., 1987; Hammes & Haller, 1983; Kane et al., 1992; Luzzo, 1995) clearly support the notion that students who are employed in

occupations that are congruent with their career interests and aspirations exhibit a variety of career decision-making benefits compared to their peers who are not working in congruent situations. Results of these investigations emphasize the need for businesses and communities to work together to provide a wide variety of work experiences for college students so that they will be able to obtain work that is congruent with their career aspirations. Findings also underscore the importance of cooperative learning arrangements and internship programs that provide students with the opportunity to "try out" various career options during their college years.

There is no question that additional research in this domain is critical to forwarding our understanding and awareness of the role that employment plays in college student development. Future research should explore other potential benefits of vocational congruence (e.g., job stability, occupational persistence, and career commitment) as we continue to develop a clearer picture of the importance of employment in the broader context of college student career development.

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Table 1

Levels of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Career Locus of Control Across Levels of Employment Status

Employment Status of the Participants	Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy[a]	Career Locus of Control[b]
Unemployed (n = 145)	169.62 (28.41)	6.43 (2.75)
Employed in An Incongruent Occupation (n = 81)	169.86 (30.34)	5.80 (2.52)
Employed in A Congruent Occupation (n = 64)	175.30 (27.36)	5.42 (2.75)

Note. [a]Higher career decision-making self-efficacy scores indicate greater confidence in one's ability to make effective career decisions. [b]Higher career locus of control scores indicate more of an external career locus of control (i.e., the belief that career decisions are outside of one's control).